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*Rules on the Proper
Settlement of Chapels*

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AN ADDRESS

TO THE

METHODIST SOCIETIES,

RECOMMENDING THE PROPER SETTLEMENT OF THEIR CHAPELS,
SO AS TO SECURE THEM TO THEIR ORIGINAL DESIGN ;

WITH

A REPLY

To the objections made against this mode of settlement.

BY THE REV. JOHN RILES.

Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethen to dwell
together in unity.

DAVID.

Truro:

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AN ADDRESS.

THE reason which has given rise to this address is the extreme unwillingness which several persons have evidenced to the regular settlement of the Chapels in the Methodist connexion on what is called the *Conference Plan*. What *private* reasons such persons may have is not for me to determine ; yet one thing is evident, that the question is not clearly understood by a great majority of those, who warmly raise objections ; and it is my design in this address to bring the subject fairly before the Methodist Societies and leave the candid and disinterested to judge of the merits of the case. The preachers certainly ought not to have an interest separate from that of the people nor the people an interest separate from the preachers, their claims and obligations are mutual, and as forming a part of the Redeemer's church on the earth, in order to union in the body there ought to be, in all essential points, union in sentiment and a perfect agreement in design : for as soul and body form the *man*, so doctrine and discipline form the *christian*. It will appear evident to every unprejudiced person, that the proper settlement of the Chapels is closely connected with the Methodist doctrine and discipline, and that this mode alone can secure them to their original use and prevent the property from being alienated.

1. For several years previous to the year 1784, it had been much doubted whether the Chapels were properly secured to the connexion. This was a subject of considerable importance as large sums of money had been generously subscribed to erect new Chapels, for no other purpose than for the use of the Methodist societies and the preachers appointed from time to time

y the Conference. Various methods were proposed to secure the Chapels, not as the *property* of the *preachers*, (for *they* have no property in them) but to their original design. Accordingly, in the year 1784, Mr. Wesley executed the *Deed of Declarations*, constituting one hundred of the travelling preachers, "The Conference of the people called Methodists." The design of this was to give a legal specification to that phrase "the Conference of the people called Methodists," which is inserted in all the deeds of the Chapels. By virtue of this deed, the Conference claims the power of appointing preachers to preach in those Chapels, and to exercise every part of the Methodist discipline. This deed of declaration, which is rendered legal by enrollment, is the platform of those deeds of trust, which are known by the name of the Conference Deeds.

That the societies may judge for themselves, it may be necessary to state the power of the Trustees and how far they can prevent any improper steps a preacher may be induced to take and be a check on any arbitrary attempts of the Conference.

1. The persons in trust for a chapel do not, in consequence of that trust become proprietors, but are guardians to the society; whose duty it is to see that every part of their covenant is faithfully executed, and to prevent any part of the property from being misapplied. They have the sole right of raising monies from the seats and applying it to pay the interest of monies borrowed:—to defray the expense of repairs:—make improvements or sink the principal. And supposing there is no debt on the Chapel, they can, if they choose, let the occupiers of seats sit without paying any rent, or they can raise a fund to build a new Chapel on a larger scale at any future period. The Conference have no claims on the pecuniary concerns of the trust; they have no right to demand a farthing, therefore the whole power is in the hands of the Trustees, as it respects a faithful application of the Chapel to the use for which it was erected.

2. The power of the Trustees upon the Conference Plan is greater than many imagine. The Trustees, in union with the leaders and stewards, "if they believe that a preacher, appointed for their circuit, is immoral, erroneous in doctrine, deficient in abilities, or that he has broken any of our rules, have

" authority to summon the preachers of the district, and all the
 " trustees, stewards, and leaders of that circuit to meet in their
 " Chapel on a day and hour appointed: and if the majority of
 " the meeting judge that the accused preacher is immoral, or
 " roneous in doctrine, deficient in abilities, or that he has broke
 " any of the rules, he shall be considered as removed from that
 " circuit. And if the district committee do not appoint a preacher
 " for that circuit, instead of the removed preacher within
 " a month after the aforesaid removal, or do not fill up the
 " place of the removed preacher till another preacher be appointed
 " the majority of the said trustees, stewards, and leaders
 " being again regularly summoned, shall appoint a preacher for
 " the said circuit; provided he be a member of the Methodist
 " connexion, till the next Conference." Large Minutes p.46 47

Such then is the power of those persons who are in trust
 upon the Conference plan, and no good man would wish to
 have more power, who is studious not to seek his own, but the
 things of Jesus Christ, in the edification of the church.

3. As the Preachers have no authority to controul the Trustees
 in the execution of their trust, nor influence but what their
 faithfulness and usefulness entitle them to; it will be farther
 seen what power they have over the societies which they super-
 intend. A preacher has no power independently of the leaders
 meeting; as he can neither admit nor expel a member, unless
 by a majority of the leaders and stewards. And with respect
 to the appointment of the circuit and town stewards and leaders
 he can only nominate, it remains with the leaders to approve
 or reject the nomination. Now I would ask the most zealous
 objectors, what power have the preachers but that of attempt-
 ing to promote the interest of the Redeemer's kingdom, and
 the spiritual improvement of the church? The Trustees of
 Chapels have power to prevent the Conference from abusing
 their privilege, and the leaders have a proper check upon
 the preachers. Indeed there will be no contention for
 power on either part when both are alive to God, for the
 ground-work of suspicion and jealousy is owing to a loss of
 simplicity; the *christian* is sunk into the mere *professor*.

I shall now endeavour to meet those objections which have
 been industriously circulated with a view to prevent the regu-

the settlement of the Chapels; which objections are more plausible than sound, and have no existence but what prejudice and jealousy have given them.

1. It has been objected, "that to settle the Chapels on the Conference Plan, is to give them to the Conference." Now it requires but a moderate share of discernment to see the fallacy of this objection, and that it has no foundation in truth. The Conference have no more property in the Methodist Chapels, than the Emperor of France; nor any other right, than the annual appointment of Preachers to the Pulpit, and the exercise of discipline. It remains with the objectors to prove the contrary.

2. It has been said "but it is putting too much power into the hands of the Preachers," but let the objector say what he means by power; it is to be feared that the word *power* has been used and played upon to serve a particular purpose; and that some have made use of it to acquire authority and domination for themselves. It has already been shewn, that the Preachers have no property whatever in the Chapels; and that the Leaders and Quarterly Meetings have a sufficient check upon a Preacher, even if he should be so rash and imprudent as to attempt any thing contrary to the rules of Methodism.

3. It has been said "if the Preachers have not some design why are they so anxious to get the Chapels settled?" For this reason, because they are sensible of the evil consequences. They are sure, that if they are not properly secured to the use of the Methodist Societies on the Conference Plan, they may be perverted, and applied to any other use; and it will neither be in the power of the Preachers, nor of the Societies to prevent it; as the persons calling themselves Trustees can apply them to what use they please.

4. It has been asserted, "that some Preachers have acted very improperly; that in one instance a Preacher threatened to lock the door of a Chapel, and said there should be no more preaching unless his measures were complied with; and that another acted in a very arbitrary way." Now allowing the truth of these two cases, does it prove that the one Preacher had a right to lock the door; or that the rules of Methodism justified the other in his injudicious measure? I leave

the unprejudiced to judge of the force of this objection.

5. There is a fourth objection, and it is a very silly one and which one might suppose no person would make, unless he were unable to judge on the subject. It is asked "are not the people belonging to the Chapels, sufficient to manage their own concerns, without the interference of the Preachers in London?" I suppose this objection must arise from the deeds being sent to London, to be enrolled in His Majesty's High Court of Chancery. But the Preachers in London have nothing to do with the Chapels in Cornwall, or elsewhere; the enrollment gives them no authority. It must be a bad cause which requires such a subterfuge.

6. The last objection that I shall take notice of is, "admitting that the Conference now are a body of pious men, and have nothing in view but the salvation of men's souls, they may become corrupt at some future period." Allowing this objection all its force, what follows? Why if the Preachers are immoral in their lives, or preach erroneous doctrine, the Trustees have power to prevent, them from preaching in any Chapel, settled on the Conference Plan, for the trust-deed, which entitles the Conference to the right of the pulpit, as long as they continue a body of men, unblamable in their lives, and preaching no other doctrines, than those contained in the Rule of John Wesley's first four volumes of sermons, and his Notes on the New Testament, deprives them of that right, when they depart from such a line of conduct.

In addressing the Methodist Societies, I am confident that I am appealing in general to men of piety, candor, and good sense: and as they have heard the plausible objections on the one side, which have been answered, they are prepared to hear what can be said on the other side of the question. I consider it of great importance, as it not only concerns the present rank of Methodists, but future generations, and of course claims the attention of all those persons who are members of the societies in sentiment and principle.

1. To place the subject in as clear a light as possible, so as to be able to judge of the consequences, it is necessary to consider what is meant by the *Trustee Plan*. This is become a hackneyed phrase, which is made use of by those who oppose

The regular settlement of the Chapels. *This plan* is represented as the best and the only one that can secure to the Methodists their rights, and prevent the Preachers from making any encroachments. This potent scheme might be supposed to possess magical properties, capable of purging the Conference from corruption, and keeping the Preachers pure. Pretensions to greater rectitude of conduct have misled the unsuspecting, who are not aware of the evil it involves. But what is meant by the *Trustee Plan*? The word trustee every one knows, means, *to be entrusted* with the management of an estate, for another. The *plan* then which is opposed to the Conference mode of settlement, is not upon the principle of *trust*, but may more properly be called the *proprietors plan*, in which several persons unite conjointly to exercise their authority or share in the advantages. And as they each have a share in the building they may bequeath that share by will, and no person can deprive them of that right. The Chapels settled on what vulgarly called the "trustee plan," become the *real property* of those persons, as much as any other part of their possessions. Those persons are real owners, and when the Societies and generous friends have subscribed liberally towards the erecting of a new Chapel, they can, if they choose, deprive them of the privilege of worshipping in that Chapel, the next moment after the instrument is executed. Such a mode of settlement is fraught with the most mischievous effects

2 It becomes the Societies to watch with an extremely jealous eye the designs of such persons who, though they may contend for the trustee plan, under the pretence of preventing the Conference from exercising too much power, it is to be feared that, in many instances, it is from a love of power; they are striving to get all the power in their own hands. When this is the case, neither the Congregation nor the Society can prevent them from applying the Chapel to any use they may think proper, because it is their own property.

3. The Leaders ought seriously to consider this subject, as upon this plan, they have no more right than the Preachers. The Proprietors can prevent them from meeting their classes, holding a love-feast, having the Lord's-supper, or from exercising any other branch of the Methodist discipline they please,



for this simple reason. because they can shut the doors whenever they please. But to this it may be answered, "these persons are Leaders and Members of the Society, (we know them, cannot we confide in them?)" Allowing this to be the case, does it follow, that they will continue the same zealous, simple-hearted Christians they first were? It is possible they may, but we have many awful proofs of both Leaders and Local Preachers who *began in the Spirit and have ended in the Flesh*. I appeal to your own knowledge, are you not acquainted with some who *once ran well*: what are they now? if not openly profane, they are become careless and indifferent to religion and its privileges. Under these circumstances, can you so inconsiderately commit your rights without any security? On the Conference plan you have a permanent security, because the law of the land guards the mutual claims of both the people and preachers, and it is not in the power of either party to prostitute the Chapels to any other purpose, than that for which they were built.

4. It becomes the Societies to pause before they encourage a system that has so many evils attending it; they are giving away their money which becomes the property of those persons and their heirs for ever. But supposing the present proprietors continue friendly, are you sure that those who succeed them will? In reply to this it is said, there is a "clause put into the deeds to exclude wicked persons from the trust." This may appear very plausible, but if a person once becomes a Trustee, it is nothing but death that can dissolve his trust, for however wicked he may become, he must remain a proprietor and have the same right and influence he had before. By encouraging a plan of this kind, you commit an act of injustice on future generations, if the Chapels are perverted from their original design. The present race of pious Dissenters have to lament this want of caution in their ancestors; "As most modern socinian societies are indebted to the ecclesiastical endowments of the orthodox of a former age for their principal support, and many among them have received their education on the same ground, we hope the Trinitarian dissenters of the present day understand their principles a little better than their forefathers, and are in less danger of making be-

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"quests that may become instruments in perpetuating error." The application of this remark is, that those persons who are Methodists in principle, and subscribe to Chapels settled on an improper and unsafe plan, may be giving their money to encourage doctrines directly opposed to those they hold most dear; and their children instead of enjoying the ministry of the word of life, may be deprived of a right which the bounty of their pious ancestors entitled them to.

To conclude; if divisions and confusion are introduced into the societies by a plan which is anti-methodistical, it rests with the promoters of these disorders to account for such conduct to their Maker and Judge. Brethren seek peace and pursue it "be stedfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

Finis.

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